

# WAYS OF IMMERSION PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTATION IN TEACHING LEGAL ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** In this article the author examines the specific features of immersion approach in second language learning, gives brief information concerning the origin and further development of immersion programs. The article provides the description of closely related methods which are considered to be the theoretical basis for immersion programs.

The author discloses the relevant elements and objective advantages of the approach mentioned above. The core features and possible modes of the method under analysis are defined. The article presents the way of applying immersion programs which has been worked out to prepare future lawyers for professional communication in a foreign language and introduced at National University “Odessa Academy of Law”, Ukraine.

## ШЛЯХИ ВПРОВАДЖЕННЯ МЕТОДУ ЗАНУРЕННЯ ДО ПІДГОТОВКИ МАЙБУТНІХ ЮРИСТІВ

**Резюме:** У статті автор розглядає основні характеристики та особливості методу занурення у навчання іноземної мови, аналізує його зв'язок з іншими близькими за принципами методами, такими як інтегроване навчання предметного змісту та мови, експеренційне навчання та метод конструктивізму. Стаття описує практику впровадження методу занурення у підготовку студентів вищої школи в Україні.

Мета статті визначити переваги використання методу занурення у навчанні англійської мови для професійного спілкування, та дослідити вплив означеного методу на вивчення іноземної мови у юридичному ВНЗ.

Автор подає результати семирічної практики використання методу занурення у Національному університеті «Одеська юридична академія», Україна.

## IMPLEMENTACJA PROGRAMÓW STOSUJĄCYCH METODĘ ZANURZENIA W JĘZYKU PRZY NAUCZANIU JĘZYKA PRAWNEGO

**Abstrakt:** W artykule autorka bada specyficzne cechy metody zanurzenia w języku obcym w trakcie jego nauki, analizuje początki i rozwój tego typu programów oraz opisuje metody, które mogą stanowić dla nich bazę teoretyczną. Przedstawione zostają istotne elementy i zalety powyższej metody, a także sposoby ich implemetnacji w programach przygotowujących prawników do profesjonalnej komunikacji w języku obcym wprowadzone na Uniwersytecie Narodowym “Odessa Academy of Law” na Ukrainie.

## **Introduction**

Teaching English for Specific Purposes in Ukraine today gains greater importance as one of the essential labour market requirements is a good command of foreign languages (at least English). Unfortunately, Ukrainian researchers underline that traditional methods of teaching English for professional communication failed to provide the students with sufficient level of foreign language speaking. One of the reasons for this is the absence of widespread practice of up-to-date so called non-traditional methods of foreign language teaching, such as immersion programs, content and language integrated learning, experiential learning and constructivist approach (Korneeva 2011, 80, Tarnopolski 2008, 20).

Nevertheless, there are a few high educational establishments in Ukraine which developed and put into practice immersion programs for economic students. But no theoretical or practical material concerning immersion programs implementation for law students has been elaborated.

Taking into consideration everything mentioned above, it is obvious that there is a vital need for introducing modern methods of foreign language teaching in Ukrainian Law School to make its graduates competitive on international labour market.

The main purpose of the article is to explore the advantages of immersion programs implementation in Teaching English for Specific Purposes and to disclose the impact of the mentioned approach on second language acquisition in Law School.

The objectives of the article are to analyse the connections of immersion approach with other closely related techniques, such as content and language integrated learning, experiential learning and constructivist approach.

The article describes the practice of introducing immersion programs into students training in tertiary education and presents the result of seven years' practice of immersion programs at National University "Odessa Academy of Law", Ukraine.

## **Origins and further development of immersion programs**

More than thirty years of language immersion instruction in different European and Western countries (the USA, Canada, France, Spain and others) have produced an impressive body of research demonstrating its benefits to students. But in Ukraine there is no widespread practice of introducing immersion programs in foreign language teaching especially teaching English for Specific Purposes in tertiary education.

The immersion approach that was pioneered in the mid-1960s in Montreal was a predecessor of and, indeed, one of the first programs to emphasize the importance of using the foreign language as a vehicle for teaching content. Immersion programs were initially created to provide English-speaking students in Quebec with an opportunity to acquire Canada's two official languages – English and French. Since 1965, immersion programs have been developed in a variety of other languages (e.g., Hebrew-English; Hawaiian-English; Mohawk-English; Japanese-English; Basque-Spanish; Swedish-Finnish) and for a variety of purposes (Johnson and Swain 1997).

Immersion language programs took root in areas such as North America, Canada, and the USA, where educators felt that more than one language was necessary for children's future economic and social prosperity. Program designers wagered that

making the second language the sole medium for teaching core subject content, instead of teaching the second language separately, would result in more students reaching higher levels of proficiency. These early immersion programs started by committing one-half or more of the school day to teachers and students to work only in the second language. Students were socialized to adopt the new language for all classroom communication and subject learning (Fortune 2012, 10).

This approach to second-language and literacy development proved itself to be the most successful school-based language program model available. English-proficient immersion students typically achieve higher levels of minority (non-English) language proficiency when compared with students in other types of language programs (Campbell et al. 1981, 44-54). Immersion students who begin the program as English speakers consistently develop native-like levels of comprehension, such as listening and reading skills, in their second language. They also display fluency and confidence when using it. Further, the more time spent learning through the non-English language, the higher the level of proficiency attained.

According to K. Clark, immersion is “an approach to teaching a new language where learners receive all or most of their instruction in the new language together with others who are learning that language (Clark 2000, 24).

It also can be defined as a method of teaching language, usually a second language, in which the target language is used as both curriculum content and media of instruction.

### **Immersion programs and other closely related approaches**

The immersion program is closely related to other current approaches to second language teaching, such as, content and language integrated learning, experiential learning and constructivist approach.

On the one hand, language immersion represents a set of methods of teaching foreign languages, in which language and subject area content are learnt in combination. This set of methods is known as **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)** (Coyle 2007). It describes any learning activity where language is used as a tool to develop new learning from a subject area or theme.

The advantages of CLIL especially in acquiring a foreign language for professional communication are that it allows language to be used for real purpose and in context; it can be a very effective way of establishing interdisciplinary connections. It often involves the use of authentic resources from the country whose language is being learnt and discussing other points of view and can contribute to intercultural understanding.

Language immersion programs as well as CLIL belong to the well-known pedagogic approach which was founded by J. Dewey and got the name “**experiential learning**” in modern methodology. It is defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Dewey 1938). The key feature which makes it different from CLIL is that experiential learning/teaching suggests using any extra-linguistic activity but not only specifically connected with studying certain disciplines for foreign language acquisition. The experiential learning is an educational orientation which aims at integrating theoretical and practical elements of learning,

emphasizing the significance of experience for learning. Experiential learning creates an opportunity for students to engage and to apply academic understandings through hands-on experience, while simultaneously learning new information concerning professional field. Through experiential learning, students arrive to class eager to share their experiences in the field.

Experiential learning/teaching as a practical realization of CLIL in teaching foreign languages for specific purposes particularly in tertiary education is based on principles of constructivism, a theoretically broader approach, developed by Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotskii, who is its founder, Jerome Bruner and John Dewey.

In his turn, Ukrainian professor Oleg Tarnopolski, who works on immersion programs in tertiary education, emphasizes that constructivist language teaching, especially for professional communication, increasingly gains popularity in modern methodology of foreign language teaching. He adds that constructivism is probably one of the most efficient approaches to teaching English for Specific Purposes, especially when it concerns tertiary education students (Tarnopolski 2008, 24). It is so because under the conditions of constructivist teaching/learning the process of acquiring a foreign language for professional communication becomes quite similar to the process of learning majoring disciplines, thus turning it into an organic constituent of professional training. In general, the constructivist approach to teaching/learning any subject (including foreign languages and English for Specific Purposes among them) may be defined as the approach providing students with opportunities of constructing their own knowledge and skills through practical experience in real-life or modeled activities. In this case, students acquire their knowledge and skills as a by-product of their real-life or modeled activities, thus internalizing the knowledge and skills and not just learning them.

Taking in account everything mentioned above it could be assumed that implementing immersion programs in law students training today is likely to be one of the most efficient ways to prepare future lawyers for international cooperation in the professional sphere.

### **Elements and objective advantages of immersion programs**

Experiences in immersion programs illuminate the practice of foreign language teaching and indicate effective ways of attaining high levels of academic content mastery and target language proficiency. Evaluations of a variety of immersion programs suggest at least three elements of general relevance for second language instruction:

- (i) instructional approaches that integrate content and language are likely to be more effective than approaches in which language is taught in isolation;
- (ii) an activity-centered approach that creates opportunities for extended student discourse is likely to be beneficial for second language learning;
- (iii) language objectives should be systematically targeted along with academic objectives in order to maximize language learning.

There can be observed a number of objective advantages of immersion programs over conventional ways of foreign language teaching. They are as follows.

- (i) First, language is acquired most effectively when it is learned for communication in meaningful and significant social situations. The academic content of the curriculum can provide a meaningful basis for second language

learning, under the circumstance that the content is of interest or value to the learners.

- (ii) Second, the integration of language and content instruction provides a substantive basis for language learning. Important and interesting content, academic or otherwise, gives students a meaningful basis for understanding and acquiring new language structures and patterns. In addition, authentic classroom communication provides a purposeful and motivating context for learning the communicative functions of the new language. In the absence of content and authentic communication, language can be learned only as an abstraction devoid of conceptual or communicative substance.
- (iii) Third is the relationship between language and other aspects of human development. Language, cognition, and social awareness develop concurrently in students. Integrated second language instruction seeks to keep these components of development together so that second language learning is an integral part of social and cognitive development in educational settings.
- (iv) Finally, knowing how to use language in one social context or academic domain does not necessarily mean knowing how to use it in others. The integration of second language instruction with subject content respects the specificity of language use (Short 1993).

### **Core features and modes of immersion programs**

Immersion represents the most intensive form of content-based foreign language instruction (Snow et al. 1989). In an immersion program, English is not the subject of instruction, rather it is the medium through which a majority of the academic content is taught. Immersion is a specific type of integrated instruction. Immersion programs have proved to be successful; the academic achievement of immersion students is comparable to that of students educated through their native language. This indicates that the students in immersion programs acquire the second language skills they need to master the academic skills and information appropriate for their grade level. R. Johnson and M. Swain summarize eight core features of immersion programs as follows:

- (i) foreign language is a medium of instruction;
- (ii) the immersion curriculum parallels the local native language curriculum;
- (iii) overt support exists for the native language;
- (iv) the program aims for additive bilingualism;
- (v) exposure to the foreign language is largely confined to the classroom;
- (vi) students enter with similar (and limited) levels of foreign language proficiency;
- (vii) the teachers are bilingual;
- (viii) the classroom culture is that of the local native language community; (Johnson and Swain 1997).

As for the mode of teaching process within the immersion program, following a number of researchers, we can point out some models of training practice. They are:

- (i) total immersion – with no native language support in teaching certain disciplines (Johnson and Swain 1997);
- (ii) partial immersion – when native language is used at primary stage of studying and is gradually pulled out from the teaching process (Genesee 2004, 547-576);

- (iii) sheltered or structural immersion – when a certain discipline is studied in foreign language but the usage of native language is adjusted by the teacher to the needs of students according to their foreign language level (Cummins 2000);

For immersion education to attain its maximum potential it must be integrated into an educational philosophy that goes beyond just the discipline of Applied Linguistics. Students must have opportunities to communicate powerfully in the target language if they are going to integrate their language and cognitive development with their growing personal identities. This is a challenge that educators are only beginning to address in immersion and bilingual programs around the world but it is in these programs that there is the most potential for truly preparing citizens who can make highly significant contributions to their own and our global societies. For this to happen, however, immersion educators must explicitly locate their pedagogy and educational vision in the realm of global education and ensure that language policies operating in the tertiary education are consistent with this philosophy of global education.

### **Practice of immersion programs at National University “Odessa Academy of Law”**

It has been 7 years since the practice of immersion program started at National University “Odessa Academy of Law”. Its purpose is to provide students with profound knowledge of core law subjects as well as good command of a foreign language for professional communication and to make them competitive on international legal arena.

Our practice of immersion programs is developed on the basic principles and conceptions of immersion education listed above and can be characterized as total immersion when content of various discipline (civil law, criminal law, sociology, contemporary business culture, etc.) is taught completely in a foreign language (particularly in English) without any native language support at the lectures and seminars. The teachers, who deliver lectures and conduct seminars are bilingual.

A number of researchers argue that immersion programs especially for the students who study English for Specific Purposes should start with sheltered or structured immersion, that is with certain native language support because of their insufficient level of language proficiency (Korneeva 2011, 80, Tarnopolski 2008, 20).

In our case we solved this problem by means of selecting students with the language level sufficient for language immersion program. At primary stage of our immersion program all first year students take a language test. It enables to select students with the level of language proficiency which corresponds to B2+ or C1 according to CEF (Common European Framework of Reference). The students are assessed according to the following criteria:

- (i) Lexical competence
- (ii) Grammatical competence
- (iii) Semantic competence

According to the results of the test a group of about 100 students is formed every year.

The students who are selected to join the immersion program, which is referred to as “A course of lectures and seminars on law disciplines in English”, have three or four classes within this program twice a week during four years of studying. The rest of the classes are attended by them according to general curriculum. Every course of lectures and seminars in different disciplines accounts 6 lectures and 6 practice classes for each of them. For the purposes of the latter ones the general group of students is divided into 3 smaller groups to enable the realization of such studying activities as:

- (i) project work (when students do profession-oriented learning projects using the target language);
- (ii) brainstorming,
- (iii) case studies and discussions on professional issues in the target language;
- (iiii) students’ presentations on some professional issues delivered in the target language;
- (iv) students’ search for professional extra-linguistic information through target language sources (internet, audio, audio-visual, and printed ones), that search being undertaken for finding some particular information required for doing profession-oriented learning assignments.

Under the condition of the immersion program described the development of language awareness would include not just a focus on formal aspects of the language but also certain kinds of activities or projects focused on deepening students' knowledge of language and multicultural issues .

Of particular importance in the success of any immersion program are the resources that are required to enable it to function adequately and the continued high level of commitment of all involved in the program, from teachers to students. Close and fruitful cooperation of foreign language department of National University “Odessa Academy of Law” with other law discipline departments contributes greatly to realization of immersion program.

### **Concluding remarks**

Seven-years’ practice of immersion programs in National University “Odessa Academy of Law” indicates that law students, who are enrolled in immersion programs, can gain proficiency in a second language and develop cultural awareness as well as their knowledge in studying subjects. Within the process of legal training immersion programs not only contribute to efficient foreign language acquisition but stimulate development of academic skills, personal and professional qualities as well as managing abilities of future lawyers. This positive impact of immersion programs can be proved by the fact that about 15% of our graduates (compared with 3% seven years ago) are gaining their Master’s degree in educational establishments of Europe and the United States.

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